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NEA FOR FO; NSC FOR MARCHESE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: AMRE MOUSSA REVIEWS SITUATION IN LEBANON

REF: CAIRO 2199

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa told the Ambassador in a July 17 meeting (reftel) that "time is running out," and that there is a lot of groundwork to be done before the Lebanese presidential election (required to be held by mid-November). At the same time, he expressed the hope for a national unity government, but not a "total reshuffle." There should be "appropriate" representation for the Shia and Christians. He expects a new cabinet, based on the latest discussions, to contain 19 seats for the majority and 11 for the opposition, and said that the former "19 plus 10 plus 1" plan was now "over." According to Moussa, Prime Minister Sinora had accepted this "19 plus 11" formula based on Nasrallah's "hedged" agreement to accept a tribunal vote -- but it was not clear to Moussa how firm either Nasrallah or Sinora were committed to such a deal. He said that on this basis, there is "consensus" among the Lebanese that the government will continue, per the Lebanese constitution, but that the level of tension still needs to be lowered. All that is left is to put it all together he said, adding that this will take time.

¶2. (C) Moussa claimed that the opposition has dropped its demand for "all 2800 laws to be reviewed," (passed since the resignation of the opposition ministers) and now is willing to accept a compromise position whereby only a "few" of these laws would be reviewed by a new government. Moussa claimed the opposition has agreed not to seek review of some of the laws passed with respect to the Hariri tribunal. He admitted that all of this was deliberately and typically vague and tenuous.

¶3. (C) Moussa warned that "Iran can pull something at any moment." Commenting on his meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad earlier this month, he said the Syrians do not want "foreign" forces (e.g. United Nations or Arab) on their borders under any circumstances, with the possible exception of "technical observers" in some places. The Palestinian camps straddling several border points are a part of the problem. Syria would instead seek to establish a "joint committee" with Lebanon to review any border incidents.

¶4. (C) Moussa also told the Ambassador -- without elaboration -- that he had "looked Bashar in the eye and asked him if he had contact with the Israelis, and he (al-Assad) had said 'yes.'"

RICCIARDONE